

postcloture time on the Power nomination expire at 3:30 p.m. today, and that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that following disposition of the nomination, the Senate resume legislative session and vote on the passage of calendar No. 48, S.J. Res. 14, and that if passed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, at 3:30 p.m., the Senate will vote on confirmation of Samantha Power to be Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development and on passage of the joint resolution of disapproval regarding the methane rule.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

NOMINATION OF SAMANTHA POWER

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, as I have said many times in the past, Presidents should be given a good deal of discretion when choosing their political appointees, and so long as their nominees are qualified and do not obstruct the advice and consent process, the Senate should not stand in the way of their confirmation.

After all, Presidents are ultimately responsible for the actions of their administration. And if the buck truly stops at the Resolute Desk, they need to be able to trust their subordinates to get the job done.

That being said, I now come to the point of my coming to the floor; that I must vote no on the nomination of Samantha Power to be Director of USAID.

On February 18, I sent a letter to Ms. Power asking questions regarding emails that came out of her office during her time serving as U.N. Ambassador.

Heavily redacted versions of those emails obtained by my office appear to suggest that Ms. Power's staff may have been working behind the scenes to remove the Islamic Relief Agency from the U.S. Treasury Department's sanctions list.

That organization was placed on the sanctions list for what? Funneling money to terrorist groups, and, thus, removing it would allow that organization to receive private donations as well as taxpayer funds.

In her letter responding to my questions, Ms. Power claimed that she was not working to take the Islamic Relief Agency off the sanctions list. She further claimed that the emails in question were part of an effort to challenge false claims made by the Islamic Relief Agency at the U.N. denying their involvement in terrorist financing.

In order to verify her claims, I have requested, on multiple occasions, that she provide unredacted copies of the emails and complete answers to the questions that I posed in my original letter.

But after 3 months, all I have received is a collection of public press releases. I have not received the emails I requested. I have not received answers to my questions.

Normally, political appointees and nominees wait until after they are confirmed to start ignoring congressional inquiries, but in this case, it seems the Executive branch has decided advice and consent is going to be a mere formality, and there is no need to wait. This seems to be a pattern.

For instance, I asked the Secretary of HHS a number of specific questions for the record as part of the Finance Committee vetting process. I received responses that didn't even try to answer the substance of my questions.

I also asked Interior Secretary Deb Haaland to reconcile some conflicting information on her House financial disclosures and responses to questions for the record for the Energy Committee about her taxes. They weren't gotcha questions either. In fact, it was probably innocent mistakes on her part, if anything, but Secretary Haaland declined to respond at all.

Maybe the White House figures simply that they don't need Republican votes so they don't need to answer even routine vetting questions from Republicans, but then the White House can't blame Republicans for voting no on their nominees when they ignore our oversight questions.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

S.J. RES. 14

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, the methane problem is not a new one. It has quickly and drastically warmed our planet since the Industrial Revolution, and today it accounts for one-quarter of global warming.

We have no time to lose. In the short term, methane is more than 80 times more powerful and damaging than its better known cousin named CO₂.

And while we have made more progress reducing our carbon dioxide levels, methane pollution has continued to surge in the background. Even last year, with more cars off the road and many stuck in their homes, methane pollution levels just kept rising.

And it rose in record amounts. In 2020, we saw the largest ever annual increase in methane emissions. If we continue to fail to act, methane pollution from the oil and gas industry is projected to cause as much near-term global warming as 260 coal-fired powerplants every year by 2025.

This is a crisis brought on by humanity, but, thankfully, it is one that we can solve as well by humanity. We have the technology and we understand the science and we need now to summon the political will and the regulatory leadership in order to solve this methane problem.

Last week, I sent a letter to President Biden asking him to lead the world in developing a bold domestic methane strategy, and although the

administration's economy-wide goals for greenhouse gas emissions are a good baseline start, we need robust and specific targets for methane.

By voting today to rescind the Trump-era attacks on methane regulations, we can protect the Clean Air Act instead of undermining it. By reinstating strong standards, we can protect public health and create new jobs in detecting and repairing leaks. By taking a stand today for environmental progress and good governance, we can begin to repair the immense damage done by Donald Trump. He was an enemy of science, a roadblock to progress, and a willing saboteur of American jobs and health as long as he could pursue his anti-environmental agenda.

Today, we have an opportunity to recommit to climate action and to environmental justice. The COVID-19 pandemic has helped expose the deep, systemic, and historic injustices our communities of color and low-income neighborhoods continue to face, communities like those in Chelsea, MA, which has been affected by both poor air quality and some of the highest COVID-19 infection rates in the State and the Nation, or Weymouth, MA, which grapples daily with the public health and public safety threat of a natural gas compressor station.

Big oil and big gas corporations have used places like Weymouth as a way station for pollution, without fear of reprisal for emissions of methane and toxic compounds. This week, we can stand up for justice for these communities instead of idly standing by.

By passing this resolution on the floor this afternoon, we can make real progress for the climate, for our global community, and for all Americans who breathe different air because of their race, their ZIP Code, or their income level.

In Massachusetts, Ralph Waldo Emerson said that health is the first wealth. Today's vote is a decisive victory for our families. It will give the Biden administration the tools it needs to shut in this methane for a very inexpensive cost to the oil and gas industry, providing real benefits to the health of our planet and the health of families in our country. As a result, I urge an "aye" vote on that CRA.

NOMINATION OF SAMANTHA POWER

Mr. President, I would like to speak on behalf of the nominee of the Biden administration to become the Administrator for the U.S. Agency for International Development or USAID.

He has a great nominee, Samantha Power, for this job. As noted in a New Yorker profile of her, Samantha's last name, Power, comes from the Irish "de Paor" meaning "of the poor." Fittingly, she has dedicated her entire life in service of others, using her razor-sharp intelligence and fierce advocacy as a journalist, activist, and diplomat to stand with the world's voiceless masses, all while simultaneously advancing U.S. interests by building bonds in every corner of the world.

Ambassador Power has been known to be ferocious in the pursuit of justice, human rights, and democracy, always taking time to listen to other points of view with great humility.

While she disagrees with Henry Kissinger on everything from politics to the no-brainer debate of the Red Sox versus the Yankees, Henry Kissinger said that Samantha “has an excellent analytical mind, and even on matters where I might have come to different conclusions, I respected her analysis”—perhaps the highest praise ever given by a Yankees fan to a member of Red Sox Nation, of which she is proudly a member.

As an immigrant from Ireland, Samantha’s personal background gives her a unique and deep respect for this country and all that it stands for. Spending time between Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Dublin, and Boston, she received her bachelor’s degree at Yale University and went on to obtain her law degree at Harvard University. She served in several key positions during the Obama administration, including as the Special Assistant to the President, the National Security Council Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, and, notably, as the youngest ever U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

Prior to entering government service, she began her career as a war correspondent, reporting from the siege of Sarajevo, became a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, and served as the founding executive director of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard University.

As she takes on the important work of leading USAID, the challenges Samantha Power will face are daunting: recovering from a global pandemic, revamping the state of global democracy, tackling the climate crisis, and extending lifesaving assistance to the nearly 1 billion people around the world who go to bed hungry every single night. I know of no person more qualified to take on this task. She embodies that bold red, white, and blue USAID logo, which states “From the American People.”

In 2015, Samantha Power invited me to be her guest to attend His Holiness Pope Francis’s address before the United Nations General Assembly. For two Irish Catholics from Massachusetts, it was the experience of a lifetime. On that day, Pope Francis spoke of the need for compassion, inclusivity, and action to tackle the world’s shared challenges. Samantha’s career personifies each of these qualities, and I know she will take her compassion, inclusivity, and unwavering desire for action and achieve great things for the people of the United States and for the world at USAID.

There is no one better qualified, ever, to serve as the head of this Agency, and I would, with the greatest of enthusiasm, recommend an “aye” vote from every Member of the Senate on her confirmation as our Administrator

of this great group who serves in every country around the world.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, this body does not have to automatically raise taxes to pay for infrastructure. Now, I know some of my colleagues would disagree with me. Some want to raise the gasoline tax. The President—well, I think he wants to raise every tax known to man and beast to spend on infrastructure and other things. And that is—he is the President. He is an American. He is entitled to his own opinion.

But I don’t think we spent nearly enough time looking at our current spending and asking ourselves if we could reprioritize some of the ways that we are spending taxpayer money.

Let me put it another way. No person with even a casual relationship with the Federal budget and/or an IQ above a root vegetable believes that every single penny being spent today in the U.S. Government’s budget is being spent efficiently. I mean, it is just not, Mr. President. You know that. You have run a State before. You have put together a budget before. It is not. For example, we waste \$144 billion a year, every year, on improper payments. We send checks to people who are not entitled to receive them—for the earned income tax credit, for example. We spend money on people who don’t exist or aren’t qualified to receive Medicaid. We even send money to dead people, and they cash the checks—or at least their relatives do.

Now, I am not naive. I know that we will never ever—an organization as large as the Federal Government will never be able to avoid a percentage of improper payments. I understand that. But we ought to at least try, particularly on sending the checks to dead people. Even if we could reduce that \$144 billion by 10 percent or 20 percent or 25 percent, we are talking about a very large amount of recurring revenue.

A very simple solution—I suggested this to the White House, which hasn’t responded—we have passed legislation in this body, as you know, to try to stop sending checks to dead people. There is just one problem: It was made effective 3 years from now. I had to agree to it in conference to get the bill passed. There is no good reason for it other than some lobbyists insisted on it.

President Biden right now, I think, could pick up at least \$10 billion, maybe more—we are not sure how much—by just saying: Effective immediately, my administration is no longer going to send checks to dead people. I mean, who is going to get mad? Who supports sending money to dead people? The American people don’t.

No. 2, we could repurpose the money—a lot of the money that we have already appropriated. I have lost

count on how much money we have appropriated for coronavirus—not just on public health but also for our economy. Look, I voted for many of the bills. I didn’t vote for the last one because I felt the last one was unnecessary, it was too expensive, and it really wasn’t about the coronavirus.

But I think all fairminded people can agree right now on two things: No. 1, a lot of the money we appropriated in the last coronavirus bill has not been spent, and No. 2, we are no longer in an economic crisis. The main crisis we have right now is that our small business women and small business men can’t find workers.

So we are currently not in an economic crisis, and I think we can go back and take some of that money—and my State, Louisiana is going to take—some aspects of my State government—it will take them 10 years to spend all the money we sent to them in the last bill. I can tell you, given the option in my State, they are going to choose to spend that money on infrastructure and not on what Congress sent them the money to spend it on.

No. 3, there is a very interesting study by the CBO taking the years—I think it was 2013 to 2017. The CBO took the entire Federal nonmilitary workforce, on which we spend \$220 billion a year because we have to have workers, and they took every job in the Federal Government and compared it to every equivalent job in the private sector. It was a massive study. So it is apples to apples. The CBO found that the Federal Government, on average, pays a Federal worker 17 percent more annually than we pay the same worker in the private sector.

Now, I won’t begrudge anybody a living, but what if we could reduce that to 15 percent or 12 percent? What if we could just not automatically fill every vacancy? What if we actually stopped and asked ourselves, if this position has been vacant for 8 months, maybe we don’t need it. I think there are enormous savings to be had.

The final thing I will point out: Doing is better than having. Doing is better than having. You are happier when you have earned something than when somebody has just given it to you.

We are the most generous Nation in all of human history. The American people spend about \$1 trillion a year helping our neighbors and some folks who are not our neighbors but are less fortunate than we are. But we spend about \$76 billion a year on Medicaid and on food stamps for adults who are able-bodied, who are 55 years of age and younger, and who don’t have children. Many of them could work. Now, I know there are obstacles to them being able to work. Maybe they need help looking for a job. Maybe they need employment counseling. Maybe they need help with transportation. But we could save enormous amounts of money, and our citizens, our people, and our neighbors, who are receiving this money, would be better off if they had a job.